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Inviting Industry into the Classroom: Meeting Learning Outcomes While Satisfying Industry Demands

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The decision to invite industry into the classroom is rarely an easy one. Much like the separation of church and state, most academic universities acknowledge the need for separation between academia and industry. Industry should not dictate classroom curriculum, but neither should it be ignored when instructors are developing course content. There are a number of pros and cons as well as best practices to recognize when deciding if, when, and how industry should be brought into the academic classroom.

Innovative Approach or Practice that Merits Sharing with Others

Kolb's (1984) four stage learning cycle for experiential learning can be employed when working both student and industry partners. The first step in the cycle is experience. Both parties are gaining experience through working with one another (i.e. industry with students, students with industry). Stage two is observation. It is important for the industry members to come into the classroom and observe the students working and experience the course material first hand. Likewise, it is important for the students to observe industry as well (i.e. store visits, team meetings). The third step is reflection; this often takes place as a written assignment for students to synthesize what they have learned thus far. For industry, their reflection might be a meeting with the faculty member or student groups to discuss progress they observed. Finally, the fourth step is experimentation. This stage represents the experiential learning that students are doing and the application of their knowledge outside the scope of the traditional classroom setting. Through this experimentation, this furthers the overall experience for both students and industry which starts the learning cycle over again.

Purpose for Identified Audience

The purpose of this presentation is to identify best practices for inviting industry into the classroom and offer suggestions for how to avoid common pitfalls with industry collaboration. New instructors or instructors who have never asked industry to be part of their curriculum would benefit from the collective knowledge of these two instructors who share two very different methods for inviting industry into the classroom and offer strategies to best prepare for the "element of the unknown" which often occurs when inviting outsiders to share knowledge with students enrolled in your course.

Implementation of Practice Clearly Delineated

Instructor 1 invited industry into her Global Sourcing classroom through a grant-funded branded case study, which was awarded grant money as a prize for the three top-performing teams. The course had a total of 65 students and met twice a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes. The industry

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partner provided a list of case studies for the faculty member to choose from during the grant writing process which occurred one year prior to the implementation into the course. The commitment level was high as the industry partner visited during the class period three times during the semester. Additionally, due to high student involvement, previous course assignments were eliminated and the case study was implemented. Furthermore, only the top teams presented so involving additional faculty members to judge the student work meant there was a commitment on the departmental level as well.

Instructor 2 invited industry into her Visual Merchandising classroom through a series of guided tours through the brand's stores. The course is limited to 24 students and meets once a week for 2.5 hours. The commitment level was relatively low, the instructor sent an email to the store manager at the beginning of the semester to schedule a tour and to describe relevant material the store manager might consider covering during the tour. Each tour took one class period, therefore the face-to-face time students had with industry representatives were comparatively minimal.

Description of Success of Practice in Fostering Desired Learning Outcomes

Collectively, both Instructor 1 and Instructor 2 identified the following pros (or the successes of) to inviting industry into the classroom: (1) Provides real life examples of current industry problems and issues; (2) Gives students opportunities to interact with and build connections with industry members (3) Allows students to apply the knowledge that they are learning. One student in Instructor 2's course said, "I really enjoyed having an [industry-led] tour because it helped get each brand's perspective of visual merchandising and it increased my understanding of the field beyond my textbook." A student in Instructor 1's course provided the following feedback: "The case study is something I will be able to talk about in interviews with future employers. It really gave me insight into how complex the industry really is." In addition, both instructors identified separate successes based on the different approaches to industry collaboration. Due to the limited scope of this proposal, they could not all be included but will be discussed in the presentation.

Indication of Plans for Continuation, Revisions or Follow-Up

Instructor 1 has replied for the grant and plans to conduct the case study again next year. However, there were several limitations to partnering with industry that will need to be addressed going forward. For instance, Instructor 1 plans to negotiate with the industry partner to align the case study with the course learning outcomes. The case study options did not align well with the course objectives and so it is important going forward that the case study can be tailored not only to the industry partner's needs, but also fit within the course objectives. Furthermore, multiple industry members are involved in processes, while this allows multiple contacts for students, it makes it difficult to get a clear understanding of the industry partners anticipated outcomes. Many instances occurred where conflicting information was given. During the next round, Instructor 1 will request a singular point of contact for the duration of the case.

Reference: Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall